

## **How Are High Schools Different Since the 1950s?**

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Although some aspects of high schools in Illinois have remained the same since the 1950s, many features have changed. One such factor that has changed greatly is race in schools. Also, gender equality has been greatly affected by the times. Finally, there are many little aspects of how life in high schools has changed. High schools have changed, but how different are they really?

Racial factors in high schools have changed greatly within the course of fifty years. Not only are schools finally integrated, but also many different races have the opportunity to learn in high schools in Illinois. Integration was first enacted in 1955. Although part of the fifties witnessed African American students in all Illinois high schools, it was not until the mid-fifties that the law was passed. The first part of the Fifties was full of "all white schools" and "colored schools." The "colored schools" were over crowded and there was a great lack of supplies, even if "white schools" had empty classrooms and supplies to spare. Even after the integration of schools in Illinois, all students were not equal. In Chicago, Superintendent Benjamin Willis allowed no transfers of African Americans to "all white schools." Instead, mobile units were provided for the African American students. Through all of this, 562 classrooms were empty in white schools, while schools in the "black ghetto" were still over populated.

Also, with all of the unequal rights of the African Americans, there were fewer advantages for them. In the 1950s, only one out of every four African American students finished high school. These examples clearly show how different high schools were in the 1950s.

Another aspect that was quite different in the 1950s was women's equality. In 1972, Title Nine was passed. This allowed girls in high schools to participate in the same sports as the boys. There were virtually no opportunities for girls in the 1950s. Title Nine wiped out any discrimination because of gender in schools, but there was no such law in the 1950s to guarantee the rights of girls in high schools. The girls were treated as "second class" in high schools, "regardless of their ability" It was extremely different in the 1950s, for girls, as opposed to now. Girls now are encouraged to become anything from soccer champions to space shuttle commanders.

Finally, there are many facts that demonstrate how different high schools were in Illinois in the 1950s. Students do not do well on standardized tests. On the average, verbal scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test have dropped more than 35 points. Also, high school students have scored far worse on math and science scores. Along with these test scores, consolidation of schools has led to far more districts in Illinois since the 1950s. There are many statistical features that have changed since the 1950s as well. For instance, a teacher's formal education was one of the most important factors in determining whether or not she/he was hired in the 1950s. Now, it is one among several

factors. Also, the matter of religion has changed quite a lot since the 1950s when only 39 percent of people polled in a survey thought that a religion class should be taught in high school. Now 50 percent think that a religion class should be part of the curriculum.

As can be seen, high schools in Illinois are quite different since the 1950s. The race of a person no longer determines where they will go to school or what type of education they will receive. Also, the gender of a person will not decide what they can and cannot participate in at school. Finally, there were many little aspects to high school life that have changed since the 1950s. Life certainly has gotten quite different.

[From Samuel Gove and James Nowlan; *Illinois Politics and Government*;

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